

Brand Augustus: a Roman marketing campaign in operation

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Why do Adidas pay David Beckham to wear their football boots? Why do Estée Lauder pay Liz Hurley to be associated with their fragrances? Liz and David are not turning their respective products into better boots or perfume. What they are doing, though, is giving the products glamour through being associated with them: they are helping to create a product brand. When it's marketed well, establishing a brand in the mind of the consumer can work brilliantly: I don't know whether or not other deodorants smell nicer than Lynx, but I buy Lynx because I want to be associated with 'the Lynx effect'. It is the brand that has pulled me into buying the product. And not only me: Lynx is steadily cornering the market in this area.

The Roman emperor Augustus, I'd like to suggest, employed many of the tricks that marketing managers get paid fortunes to come up with today. Just like a brand, he had no specific "right" to be dominant, but he used marketing to induce people to accept him as dominant, rather than overthrow him for effectively replacing the Republic with one man rule.

What's in a name?

Hundreds of thousands of pounds today are spent on getting the name of a new product right, or on changing one that is not working. Why did Opal Fruits become Starburst? A name is crucial in communicating the sort of image you want your brand to convey, and Gaius Iulius Caesar Divi Filius Octavianus knew this well.

For this was Augustus' name before he added his *cognomen* (the added final name) in 27B.C. And yet he was born in 63B.C. as plain Gaius Octavius. The Octavii were a relatively minor senatorial family, a fact which would become embarrassing for someone who later claimed divine heritage. His adoption in Julius Caesar's will (43B.C.) improved things immeasurably: he was now Gaius Iulius Caesar Octavianus, the -anus suffix indicating the family out of which he had been adopted. This soon became Gaius Iulius Divi Filius ('son of the divine') Caesar Octavianus, when Julius Caesar was officially declared a god: far better to have a god as a father than a minor aristocrat. Then, in the early 30s BC, as the tensions of the second Triumvirate – the alliance between Octavian (as we call him for short), Mark Antony and Lepidus – became more apparent, 'Imperator' ('Commander') was added in front of his name. This indication of military prowess suited him well at the time when control of the legions was crucial: coins were duly released with this title inscribed on them.

However, he was yet to decide on a *cognomen*. Such titles could say a great deal: Scipio, the conqueror of Hannibal, had settled on 'Africanus' so that people would be reminded of his feat. What would Rome's new number one decide? With his power more firmly established, he opted for Augustus (at Munatius Plancus' suggestion, allegedly). As Suetonius tells it,

Some senators wished him to be called Romulus, as the second founder of the city; but Plancus had his way. He argued that 'Augustus' was both a more original and a more honourable title, since sanctuaries and all places consecrated by the augurs are known as 'august'.

(Augustus 31.2)

Romulus might have been a good name in that it had connotations of foundation, but it also reeked of 'kingliness', something that Augustus was careful to avoid. After all, Julius Caesar had flaunted his dictatorship and been killed for his arrogance. Moreover, the way Romulus killed his brother Remus in the process of establishing control was rather too close to the bone: Augustus, after all, only four years before defeated his brother-in-law at Actium to get sole power.

'Augustus' was more neutral, and had the advantage of religious connotations. Since religious festivals measured out the year, it carried the idea of both respect and permanence, attributes befitting someone in search of indefinite power. And with his adoption of the new name, Augustus could finally edit Octavianus, the last trace of his humble origin, out of his name.

Using new media

Any major campaign today involves 'eye ball' measurement, points when the consumer's eyes and ears come into contact with your product. This has traditionally been on the television or radio, in print adverts and newspapers. Nowadays, brands appear everywhere: on football pitches, bus tickets and paving stones. A careful study of Augustus reveals that he excelled at engaging with his audience both with traditional methods and innovations.

Of course, much of what he did was traditional. Coins, for example, are a good medium through which to articulate one's power, and these were constantly issued during Augustus' reign, though whether or not he personally commissioned them is unclear. This practice had been a feature of the ancient world from the early Greeks.

In the use of another traditional medium, architecture, Augustus also excelled (though the scale on which he built was quite unprecedented). Befitting his religious brand image, he specialised in temples: he claimed to have restored 82 temples just in the year 28B.C., and was also responsible for commissioning some spectacular new constructions such as the Temple of the Divine Julius (a useful reminder of Augustus' personal link with the god), the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine (a splendid structure contrasting nicely with the relatively modest dwelling of Augustus himself – just next door...) and the Temple of Mars the Avenger which dominated Augustus' own forum.

Yet real impact in a marketing campaign comes when companies use media in a new way. Duracell have paid for Duracell banners to be wrapped around each of the big four chimneys at Battersea Power Station. With the banner wrapped around them, they each have the shape and look of Duracell batteries. This not only uses a famous landmark ingeniously for high levels of eyeball coverage but it also conveys the brand associations: power and permanence. It is an unrepeatable trick, the novelty is crucial to the impact made.

Obviously, Augustus did not quite have these media at his disposal. Nevertheless, his ingenuity was extreme. As recent research has shown, he could play a few visual tricks of his own.

In 18 B.C., he put up an obelisk (a trophy from his victory in

Egypt) in an enormous piazza in Rome's Campus Martius to create a giant sundial or horologium, which displayed the position of the sun in the zodiac day by day, as well as the time of noon. The surrounding paving connected the winter solstice, the point at which the days start to grow longer again, with Capricorn, a sign linked with Augustus' own conception and birth – Augustus had had his own horoscope published by edict. Thus Augustus himself could be linked with the rebirth of the sun. Not only this but the obelisk was close to Augustus' vast Mausoleum, easily the largest tomb in the Roman world, and right next to the Altar of Peace, which was decorated with a frieze depicting Augustus at the head of a religious procession. As it went through its course, the obelisk's shadow would point towards these monuments. Such images must have reinforced the idea of Augustus' centrality to Rome, and even his cosmic importance. Augustus, it might be felt, commanded both space and time.

Going outside Rome

The vast majority of Rome's subjects would never go to Rome: communicating with them was harder. One might go on a personal tour, or issue coins, (and these were both methods used by Augustus and later emperors) but the real innovation introduced from his time onwards was in the increased usage of inscriptions - writing in stone.

It has long puzzled ancient historians as to why there are so many more inscriptions from the early Empire compared with the late Republic. I would suggest it was in part because emperors realised the importance of hitting as many eyeballs as possible with the message that they delivered, even and perhaps especially in far-flung locations. This is not to say that Augustus commissioned all these inscriptions himself: most of them commemorate private individuals and relatively few come directly from the emperor. But then this was the pattern of the Roman world; citizens would respond to what the Emperor signalled that he would like to happen. And that appears to be the case here as well.

Inscriptions were important in Rome too: Augustus had his autobiography installed in front of his Mausoleum in Rome for example, but he also ensured it was put up all over the empire (the stones that preserve it for us come from Turkey and Spain). Inscriptions were a tool which could convey quite sophisticated messages and which ensured maximum eye ball contact across the Empire. Moreover, as indicated above, it is a mark of the thoroughness of Augustus' marketing campaign that we have relatively plentiful evidence about him. The traces of this early marketing strategy are still being uncovered as fresh senatorial decrees emerge on bronzes in remote towns of the Roman empire, and other new inscriptions and statues come to light.

Conclusion

In the middle and late republic, leading Roman aristocrats competed among themselves through a wide variety of means, including the erection of buildings in Rome, putting up statues and issuing coins. The problematic – essentially illegal -nature of Augustus' regime, however, meant he *really* had to promote the right image: without constitutional backing for his position, intangible backing was crucial, and the construction of a strong brand, with as many strands of media support as possible was of paramount importance. Not that this was the end of it: no marketing campaign can work if the product is not up to the mark and political and military strengths were crucial in maintaining power. What is true, though, is that successful marketing helps brands ride through times of trouble and builds on strong positions. In this area, as in so many others, Augustus was a master.

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marketing consultancy. Contrary to his expectations, he finds that classics was not just an interesting way to spend his university years, but totally relevant to business strategy.

You might like to look at the following website:

<http://www.marketingsource.com/>

<http://www.arkelogi.uu.se/primaporta/Augustus.htm>